

FARMER TO FARMER EXTENSION FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: AN EXPERIENCE OF U.P. SODIC LANDS RECLAMATION PROJECT, INDIA

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Background:

India has around 0.73% of the sodic lands around the world. The state of Uttar Pradesh in India has some 1.2 million ha. of sodic waste lands. Such areas account for 10% of total cultivable area of the state and about 17% of the salt affected lands in the country.

Firmly believing in participatory approach, Uttar Pradesh Land Development Corporation has initiated the project with the formation of farmers organizations at village level. The process included installation of minor irrigation infrastructure, building drainage network, chemical amendments of lands and crop/horticulture production and training in leadership for the local communities. This is being executed in collaboration with local NGOs.

Since, 1993 the corporation has been implementing World Bank funded "Uttar Pradesh Sodic Lands Reclamation Project in 10 districts of Uttar Pradesh. Eighty Five percent of the beneficiary farmers are small and marginal.

Under the first phase of the project 64,414 ha. Sodic affected lands have been reclaimed covering 1,56,000 families. The farming families and the local organisations are involved right from the beginning in the planning and later in implementing and evaluating the project.

At the village level, in each village there is one Site Implementation Committee (SIC). Command area under one SIC varies from 50-60 ha. or more. Under each SIC, there are several Water User Groups (WUG). Small groups of 4-15 members within a land area of 4 ha. organise themselves into Water Users

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Groups. All decisions on group formation, implementation etc. are taken by the farmers. Farmers themselves develop their own constitution based on their traditional institutions. Project funds towards land development, leaching, irrigation infrastructure and drainage are chanelised through bank accounts of the groups. Similarly SICs also maintain joint bank accounts for maintenance of drainage network of the village. Agricultural inputs like gypsum, fertilizers, seeds etc. are also made available to them through the SIC only.

In each village at least one Mitra Kisan (MK) and one Mahila Mitra Kisan (MMK) and Master trainers in the fields like Agriculture, Animal husbandry, Health, Literacy, Pump set mechanic and shallow well boring mechanic are developed through intensive & regular training. These trained master trainers train fellow farmers in SIC meeting, organize demonstration of skills and knowledge. This Farmer to farmer extension system has worked effectively during project implementation. But there was a big question about sustainability of project outputs and vast human resource developed after withdrawal of project.

Since the year 1998 an attempt has been made to evolve appropriate mechanism to get answers-**how do we**, however asses the prospects of long term sustainability of such service-delivery? **How do we** ensure that the physical and social infrastructure created in rural communities will continue to function effectively and efficiently after withdrawing the project. Thus a strategy was developed to ensure sustainability of project interventions vis-a-vis capacity of the participating farming community, functioning of local farmers institutions and effectiveness of linkage mechanisms and networking. It is a process of collaborative problem solving through the generation and use of knowledge which leads to action learning and shared decision making. In our understanding Farmers to Farmers Extension is a way of improving the effectiveness of rural extension efforts by and within the community themselves and other organization engaged in rural development. If they are instutalized in extension organization, they can help to improve organizational performance at the interface between service providers (the extensionists & Researchers) and the clients (the farmers). However, the main characteristics are;

- ◆ Strengthening of rural people's problem solving, planning and management abilities.

- ◆ Promotion of farmers capacity to adapt and develop new and appropriate technologies/innovations (Usually agricultural technologies and practices, but also social institutions, health, water and sanitation, and other rural development domains).
- ◆ Encourage farmers to learn through experimentation building on their own knowledge and practices and blending them with new ideas.
- ◆ The goal is to achieve equitable and sustainable development through the negotiations of interests among different social groups of the community and by providing space for the poor and marginalized in collective decision making.

The Approach:

To overcome normal trend of sense of dependency of the community on outside agencies are being made with shift away from problem-oriented approach towards processes, which built on community achievements, existing strengths and local skills. The trained resource persons of the community are being helped to create a shared vision of an equitable and sustainable future and then moved towards it through the activities initiated and managed by they themselves. Besides regular capacity building interventions are essential so as to enable such institutions/community members to measure progress towards their vision and to modify their strategies as per circumstances change.

There are four steps, which is being followed during such interventions e.g. -

Discovery: Farmers are facilitated to identify their own as well as school/club's strengths achievements and complements received etc.. They are further enabled to re-discover and restore forgotten and ignored human values through various exercises.

Dreaming: Under this stage farmers are again facilitated to build up their personal as well as school's dream and in the process they also identify personal benefits to them if their personal and school's dreams are fulfilled. The whole process is so devised that they are able to synchronize their personal dreams with school's dreams and also see that most of their personal dreams will be achieved automatically if school's dreams are fulfilled.

Box I (Vision Mapping)

One of the farmers presented such vision in a very fantastic way and expressions! interpretations/articulation *was* very interesting which one can only be felt / realised. It is very difficult to bring *those* feelings in words. However some of those are as per following.

“I got a deep sleep and had a dream in which I was going along with other farmers. I asked other farmers where are you going. They told that we are going to kisan (farmers) Vidyalaya (School/institution). Immediately various questions came in my mind. I asked that ever since I have not heard about such schools. what is that? In reply other farmers (accompanying me) told that it is our own organisation, made by us for our own development in agriculture and allied field to improve the quality of life through self-reliance. When I entered inside the school one of my neighbourer was found there. On asking it was replied that he is one of the “Master Trainer”. Then I asked how come you become “Master Trainer”? You don’t have any degree or diploma? Being highest producer of wheat and paddy I become Trainer. All other member of our school selected me. And so on.

Main point of goal

- To bring peace and happiness in our life/healthy life.
- To produce more with less investment in agriculture.
- To build a network with various development agencies, universities and others.
- To remove evils of the society so that hindering forces are reduced.
- To resolve conflicts of the village.
- To *promote organic farming* so that *environmental* degradation in *reduced* to
- Protect nature including human.
- To become self-reliance so that we need not to be dependent on others.
- School would have own place and infrastructure.
- Our school would be famous in and around the region.

Designing: Now farmers draw an action plan to achieve the school's dreams on the basis of their discovery in step -I. The activities, which are required to be performed, are sub-divided into three categories je.. (1) Which can be performed by school independently. (2) Which can be performed by school with some help from outside institutions. (3) Which can be performed by outside institutions only. Now these categorized activities are further sub-divided into three sub-categories again i.e.. (1) To be done now. (2) To be done soon. (3) To be done later. Farmers are facilitated to drop 3rd categories on the basis of restored human values i.e. (1) Which can be performed by outside initiation only. (2) To be done later. This action plan is prepared in what, where, by whom and when format with measurable indicator of success for each acuity as given in Box no. -II.

Box-II Action Plan of Fathepur School:				
What	Where	When	By Whom	Indicators of success
1. Vaccination Camp	Rampur	31 July 2001	Lalu Singh	250 animals vaccinated
2. NADEP Composting	In each village	30 June, 2001	Karan Singh	5 compost pits in each village
3. Field Day	Azgaon	31 March,	Han Prasad	15 farmers from each 2001 & Rani adopted dhaincha for Singh green manuring
4. Health Care				
5. Training on Wheat				
6. Demonstration				

Delivery: The activities, which are to be done now, are initiated immediately.

The Process:

Since organizing institutions for such activities is ongoing process, building up the capacity of people to develop new ways of learning and new forms of leadership has been taken through a series of meetings, workshops and exposure visits where similar institutions are bit ahead for the participating

farmers and NGOs. Thus, in each districts such process has been initiated. There is a variation between the districts. By and large farmers institutions (Farmers clubs/Farmers Field Schools) have been formed involving 10-25 villages in surrounding areas. Each institution have 2/3 types of membership i.e. general members, executive members and life members with varied annual subscriptions besides registration fees. The manner in which the institutions run are as follows;

- ◆ The institution run in a democratic way and all the executive members including life members have the right to take part in the decision making process.
- ◆ The executive body select master trainers based on certain indicators (Box-I) developed by them from all the member villages for extension activities.
- ◆ Collected subscriptions and donations from interested individuals as well as groups (Self Help Groups) which are kept in nearest bank with joint signatory.
- ◆ Such funds are utilised for contingencies besides payment to the master trainers for organising training and demonstrations. A part of the fund are also utilised to build capacity of master trainers and linkages with other organisations.
- ◆ Member farmers of respective villages take responsibility to co-ordinate for execution of extension activities in their villages through villages level institutions/SHGs/as well as individual interested farmers those who have paid annual subscription only.
- ◆ A network will be build among the institutions in all the 10 district for learning actions. They will meet on quarterly basis on rotation in all such institutions.
- ◆ A small hand written newsletter 'will be published compiling successful efforts, failures etc. to strengthen innovations.

Box- III

The following parameters are the basis for selection of master trainers.

- ★ Affinity towards the specific cause and thoughts.
- ★ Best practitioner in the respective fields.
- ★ Good personal image within the community.
- ★ Acceptable to majority of the members of community.
- ★ Able to give sufficient time for others.
- ★ Good influencing ability to convince others.
- ★ Attitude towards social services.
- ★ Strong desire to do something better.
- ★ High level urge of learning and sharing with others.
- ★ Functionally literate.

Box – IV

The functions of farmers club / field schools are to :

- ★ Secure sustainability in natural resource use through increase of production, productivity, reduction in cost of cultivation with low external inputs.
- ★ Adoption of organic farming, integrated pest and nutrient management practices, seed production and marketing of produces for self-reliance.
- ★ Help organise people to generate and use their own knowledge and research to advocate their own rights.
- ★ Provide social infrastructure to improve social cohesion and cooperative actions.
- ★ Improve access of rural populations to information, flow of information to government and other organizations and link between farmers, extension services and research stations.

Conclusion:

There is no doubt that intensive capacity building intervention in right direction is very much essential for the community to reach to the stage where these systems operate efficiently. Without sufficient professional skill of the implementing agencies (UPLDC & NGOs) such effort may not continue in a sustainable manner. The dangers come from conventional approaches of creating dependency through various schemes of subsidies of other agencies with too little understanding of implications of such approach.

Perhaps such approach is first and new of its kind in the state. Both the corporation & NGOs are new in such approach in trying to enhance farmers' position through Farmers to Farmers Extension for overall development of the community in a sustainable manner for self-reliance. It is just beginning but it will take much time to bring changes in development process. Such farmers to farmers extension approach through farmers institutions has got tremendous effect towards sustainability and self-reliance.

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